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ATARI FORCE™

ATARI FORCE

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THE PLACE: THE *NORTHCAL HEADQUARTERS* OF THE *ATARI TECHNOLOGY AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE*, IN THAT PART OF THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT THAT USED TO BE KNOWN AS *CALIFORNIA* BEFORE THE "*BREAK-UP*"...

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRUDER ALERT!

THE SITUATION: A WORLD IN CRISIS...

SURE, AND THIS LITTLE BUGGY'S *RADAR SHIELD* HAS DONE ITS JOB *WELL!*

IT'S WITHIN *SHOUTING DISTANCE* OF YON FINE BUILDING THAT I AM, BUT NOT A *PEEP* HAVE I HEARD FROM THEIR *SECURITY SCREENS!*

I'LL BE TAKING THEM *UNAWARES*, I THINK--

--AND AFTER ALL, WASN'T THAT *THE PLAN?*

ITS ENGINES MUFFLED BY HIDDEN BAFFLES, THE DARK-PAINTED HOVERCRAFT SETTLES SILENTLY INTO THE SHADOWS OF A MOON-LIT GROTTO...

THE LADS AT ATARI SECURITY HAVE GROWN A MITE COCKY WITH THEIR PRETTY WEAPONS AND CLEVER SENSORS...

...AND TONIGHT, I'M THINKING, IT'S GOING TO COST THEM DEAR.

AHH, BUT IT'S A SAD THING THAT THEY'VE SO SOON FORGOTTEN THE LESSONS OF THE FIVE DAY WAR!

ALMOST, IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE MY HEART BLEED.

SURE, IT'S A RUDE AWAKENING THAT AWAITS THEM.

I THINK I'LL LET THEM SLEEP A WHILE LONGER.

AND THERE THEY BE, LIKE DREAMING BABES.

WITH THE IMAGE INTENSIFIER BUILT INTO MY GOGGLES, I'M SEEING THEM CLEAR AS A BRIGHT SUMMER MORN IN COUNTY KERRY...

"... AND THE POOR DARLINGS DON'T EVEN KNOW THEY'RE BEING WATCHED."

DON'T THINK I'LL EVER GET USED TO THE SOUND OF THAT FORCE FIELD.

BLASTED THING MAKES MY TEETH ACHE.

ULTRA-FREQUENCY SONICS.. THEY'RE A KILLER, ALL RIGHT.

YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN THE GUARD-DOGS, THE NIGHT WE FIRST TURNED IT ON.

THE DOGS COULDN'T STAND IT-- THEY STARTED HOWLING AS SOON AS THE FIELD WENT UP, AND DIDN'T STOP TILL WE SHUT IT DOWN NEXT MORNING.

NOW WE WALK PATROL WITHOUT THE DOGS... AND I MISS 'EM.

CHECKPOINT DELTA REPORTING TO BASE SECURITY...

...ALL CLEAR AT THE PERIMETER.

IT'S A NICE NIGHT, TOO BAD YOU FOLKS DOWN IN THE PIT CAN'T JOIN US.

LET'S LEAVE THE SLANG BACK IN THE DORMS, DELTA CHECKPOINT.

WE DON'T CALL IT "THE PIT"-- PROPER TERMINOLOGY IS SECURITY BASE STATION, SUB-LEVEL SEVEN!

BUT THANKS FOR THE THOUGHT.

ROGER, BASE SECURITY. CHECKPOINT DELTA, SIGNING OUT.

IT IS A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT UP THERE, CAPTAIN.

I ALMOST WISH...

SO DO WE ALL, SON.

BUT THE WAR LEFT THINGS PRETTY UNSETTLED, OUTSIDE.

WE HAVE TO BE ON GUARD CONSTANTLY.

LET'S HOPE THOSE MEN REMEMBER THAT...

"BECAUSE, IF THEY SLACK OFF--

"--IT COULD MEAN DISASTER!"

WHAT THE--?

LESSON ONE IN GUERRILLA WARFARE TACTICS: GRAB THE INITIATIVE AND KEEP IT--

--BECAUSE, IF YOU LET IT SLIP--

WHAK!

KTHUNK!

--YOU'RE FINISHED!

IT'S ASLEEP THEY'LL BE, FOR AN HOUR AT LEAST--MAYBE MORE.

THAT'S ALL THE TIME I'LL NEED.

--BY USING THIS SPECIALLY-DESIGNED TUNING FORK, I CAN DISRUPT THE SONIC FIELD FOR HALF A SECOND, IN ONE SMALL SPOT.

ATARI SPENT MILLIONS TO PERFECT THIS FORCE FIELD, AND A WONDERFUL TRIUMPH OF SCIENCE IT IS, TOO.

IT'LL STOP BOMBS--LASERS --EVEN A PARTICLE BEAM.

BUT-- AND THERE'S ALWAYS A "BUT"--

FOR THAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH SCIENTIFIC TRIUMPHS.

THEY'RE ONLY A TRIUMPH UNTIL SOMETHING NEW COMES ALONG.

A WISE WARRIOR PUTS HIS FAITH IN ONLY ONE WEAPON--

--AND THAT'S THE HUMAN MIND!

IN "THE PIT" (OR, IF YOU PREFER, SECURITY BASE STATION, SUB-LEVEL SEVEN)...

BEEP BEEP

CAPTAIN-- WE'VE GOT A FIELD BREAK AT CHECKPOINT DELTA!

NO...NO, THAT'S FUNNY...

PROBABLY JUST A MOMENTARY POWER SURGE.

SENSORS SHOW THE BREAK CLOSED BY ITSELF

KEEP AN EYE OPEN TO SEE IF IT REPEATS.

NO ALARMS... NO EXTRA GUARDS ON THE PROWL...!

I'D CALL IT THE LUCK OF THE IRISH-- BUT I'M NOT A WOMAN TO BELIEVE IN LUCK!

NOW IT'S TIME TO BE TAKING THE NEXT STEP.

FOR WEEKS, THERE'VE BEEN RUMORS OF A TOP SECRET OPERATION CALLED PROJECT: MULTIVERSE A'WORKING DOWN IN SUB-LEVEL SEVENTEEN.

THAT'S WHERE I'LL BE HEADING...

.. AND PITY ANYONE WHO TRIES TO STOP ME!

AND, AS THE MYSTERIOUS BLACK-GARBED FIGURE WITH THE LILTING GAELIC ACCENT MAKES HER WAY FURTHER INTO THE ATARI HEADQUARTERS COMPOUND, WE MUST TURN OUR ATTENTION TO A NEW SCENE, 40,000 KILOMETERS STRAIGHT UP...

THE PLACE: ATARI SOLAR SATELITE STATION ONE, DESIGNED TO BRING THE SUN'S ENERGY TO A FUEL-STARVED WORLD.

EASY WITH THAT ELECTRIC TORCH, LANSKY.

WE'RE TRYING TO WELD THESE PANELS TOGETHER--NOT MELT THEM TO SLAG!

THE MAN: MARTIN CHAMPION, COMMANDER OF STATION ONE AND CHIEF TROUBLESHOOTER FOR ATARI INSTITUTE...

SURE THING, COMMANDER.

GUESS I'M STILL NOT USED TO WEIGHTLESS CONSTRUCTION WORK.

REBUILDING THE GOLDEN GATE WAS A WHOLE LOT SIMPLER THAN THIS!

NUHP
JACKSON, LOOK OUT!
MY JET-PACK-- MISFIRED!
CAN'T CONTROL MY-- UNNNH!

YOU IDIOT, JACKSON-- YOU'VE KNOCKED THAT PANEL OUT OF ORBIT!
IT'S HEADED STRAIGHT FOR THE PERSONNEL MODULE!
IF IT HITS--WITH ALL THAT MASS-- PEOPLE WILL BE KILLED!
HEY!
COMMANDER CHAMPION IS SHOOTING AFTER IT ON AN INTERCEPT COURSE!
HE'S THROWING HIMSELF IN FRONT OF THE PANEL!

I SEE IT-- BUT I DON'T BELIEVE IT!
HE DID IT!
CHAMPION DEFLECTED THE PANEL AT THE LAST POSSIBLE INSTANT!
GOOD LORD, HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN KILLED--

--AND IT WAS ONLY BULL-HEADED *DUMB LUCK* THAT YOU *WEREN'T*, MARTIN, MY FRIEND.

NOW THAT I'VE GOT YOU HERE IN *SICK BAY*, I'VE HALF A MIND TO *KEEP* YOU HERE--AND OUT OF *TROUBLE*

LUCAS, LIKE ALL MEDICOS--

--YOU'RE A *WORRY-WART*.

I *SURVIVED*, DIDN'T I?

BESIDES, I *KNEW* WHAT I WAS DOING.

I USED THAT SAME *TACKLE* A DOZEN TIMES OR MORE BACK ON THE *GRIDIRON* AT *ANNAPOLIS*.

SPACE CONSTRUCTION ISN'T A GAME OF *FOOTBALL*, MARTIN, AS YOU *KNOW* VERY WELL...!

SOMETIMES I THINK THE *WAR* MADE YOU *RECKLESS*, EVEN AS IT MADE *ME* SOMEWHAT--*EH*.?

TING-TONG

MESSAGE INCOMING:
ATTENTION: COMMANDER MARTIN CHAMPION
DOCTOR LUCAS ORION

MESSAGE ORIGIN: ATARI INSTITUTE, NOATHCAL

APPARENTLY *SOMEONE* WANTS TO SPEAK WITH US

COMMANDER CHAMPION, DOCTOR ORION, THIS IS ASSISTANT DIRECTOR PEREZ FROM ATARI INSTITUTE, EARTHSIDE.

YOUR PRESENCE IS REQUIRED IMMEDIATELY FOR A CRASH PRIORITY MEETING OF THE PROJECT: MULTIVERSE TEAM.

LYDIA. LYDIA PEREZ!

YOUR SHUTTLE CRAFT DEPARTS IN TWO MINUTES, COMMANDER

[illegible]Y THE FORMALITY? YOU ALWAYS CALLED ME MARTIN WHEN--

I'LL SEE YOU EARTHSIDE PEREZ, OUT.

LYDIA?

PROJECT: MULTIVERSE. THAT'S THE FIRST I'VE HEARD THAT TERM.

ANY IDEA WHAT IT'S ABOUT, MARTIN?

HMM?

NO.. NO IDEA AT ALL..

LIKE SOME GREAT SILVER BIRD, THE SHUTTLECRAFT "ARMSTRONG" LEAVES ITS PERCH AND DROPS EARTHWARD IN MAJESTIC SILENCE...

. BEARING BUT TWO PASSENGERS IN A BAY DESIGNED FOR TWELVE..

THIS PEREZ PERSON SEEMED-- ODDLY COLD.

YET, I RECEIVED THE IMPRESSION. THAT IS...

...IT SEEMED AS IF THE TWO OF YOU *KNEW* EACH OTHER

IS SHE A *FRIEND* OF YOURS, MARTIN?

I ALWAYS *THOUGHT* SO, LUCAS... BUT NOW, I'M NOT SO *SURE*.

IT'S BEEN *YEARS* SINCE I SAW HER

WE *MET* SEVEN YEARS AGO, HERE IN *EARTH-ORBIT*. YOU REMEMBER THAT *DAY*...

...OCTOBER 18, 1998...

"... THE DAY ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE ON THE MOON!

"NASA--REMEMBER NASA?--HAD ESTABLISHED THE FIRST LUNAR COLONY SIX MONTHS BEFORE, AND USING A MASS ACCELERATOR, THE COLONY WAS JUST STARTING TO EXPORT BUILDING MATERIALS TO NEAR-EARTH ORBIT...

"IT WAS A PRIMITIVE LITTLE COLONY, NO MORE THAN TWO DOZEN PERSONNEL ON SITE... BUT IT WAS THRIVING...

"...AND SOMEONE AMONG OUR ENEMIES DECIDED IT WAS THRIVING TOO WELL..."

CHAPTER TWO:

DEADLY ORBIT

GOOD LORD! THAT METEOR --IT'S GOING TO--

'IT TOOK NASA SIX MONTHS OF BACK-BREAKING EFFORT TO ESTABLISH MAN'S FIRST TENTATIVE FOOTHOLD ON THE MOON

"AND IT TOOK SOMEONE ELSE JUST SIX SECONDS TO KNOCK THAT FOOTHOLD LOOSE"

"IN MISSION CONTROL AT CAPE CANAVERAL, GROWN MEN AND WOMEN WEPT AS THE FIRST REPORTS OF THE DISASTER CAME TRICKLING IN..."

LUNAR DAMAGE CONTROL REPORTS 75% OF MISSION PERSONNEL LISTED AS FATALITIES.

LIFE SUPPORT DOMES 1, 2, AND 3--TOTALLY DESTROYED--!

TELEMETRY SHOWS TEN SURVIVORS-- LOCATED IN AN OUTSIDE BUNKER THAT MANAGED TO ESCAPE DESTRUCTION

SOLAR POWER CELLS ARE PROVIDING THEM WITH ENERGY-- THE REMAINS OF THE HYDROPHONICS GARDEN WILL SUPPLY FOOD FOR TWO "LUNAR DAYS"-- ABOUT ONE MONTH, EARTH TIME--

--BUT THEIR SUPPLY OF AIR IS SEVERELY LIMITED.

THEY'LL DIE--

--SUFFOCATE--

--UNLESS A RESCUE MISSION BRINGS THEM THE AIR THEY NEED IN THE NEXT 72 HOURS!

EH? DIRECTOR LASKY?

COMMANDER CHAMPION, YOU KNOW THE SITUATION ON THE MOON AS WELL AS ANY OF US.

THOSE PEOPLE ARE 500,000 KILOMETERS FROM THE CLOSEST BREATH OF FRESH AIR

SOMEONE HAS TO BRING THEM THE AIR THEY NEED TO SURVIVE

NASA

SPACE STATION ONE HAS THE NECESSARY SUPPLIES. I'VE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE CREW CHIEF THERE, DOCTOR PEREZ.

THEY'RE READYING A MAKESHIFT SUPPLY SHIP

WHAT THEY NEED IS AN EXPERIENCED PILOT--

WHICH IS ME

TELL THEM I'M ON MY WAY!

"'EXPERIENCE' IS RELATIVE I'D BEEN TO THE MOON FOUR TIMES SINCE THE U.S. SPACE PROGRAM STARTED UP AGAIN, FULL BORE, IN THE MIDDLE 1990S...

"...BUT NOBODY ELSE HAD COMMANDED A LUNAR MISSION MORE THAN TWICE."

FWHOOM

"MOST OF US THOUGHT OUR ENEMIES HAD GIVEN UP ON SPACE BUT APPARENTLY, WE'D BEEN WRONG.

"THEY'D SUSTAINED JUST ENOUGH INTEREST, IN SPITE OF THEIR COLLAPSING ECONOMY, TO BE SPOILERS."

"LET THE POLITICIANS AND THE DIPLOMATS HANDLE THE INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE ATTACK, I THOUGHT...

"ALL I WANTED TO DO WAS HELP SAVE THOSE TEN STRANDED COLONISTS."

THIS GUY PEREZ WORKS FAST!

HE'S TAKEN A SOLAR PANEL PLATFORM-- WELDED ON A SET OF BOOSTER-ROCKETS-- AND A COMMAND MODULE--

-- STRUNG THE WHOLE THING WITH OXYGEN TANKS LIKE ORNAMENTS ON A CHRISTMAS TREE--

--AND FINISHED THE ENTIRE JOB IN LESS THAN FIVE HOURS!

NASA

--WHO CARES HOW IT LOOKS?

HUH? PEREZ. YOU'RE A WOMAN!

SO WAS MY MOTHER.

STRAP IN, COMMANDER--

--WE'LL BE LEAVING EARTH ORBIT AS SOON AS THE NAV COMPUTER COMES UP WITH A MISSION TRAJECTORY.

LOOK, I DIDN'T MEAN TO-- FORGET IT.

NASA

COMMANDER CHAMPION³ I'M PEREZ.

5

CONGRATULATIONS, PEREZ.

IT ISN'T PRETTY, BUT IF IT'LL GET US TO THE MOON--

AND FORGET WAITING FOR THE NAV COMPUTER TO FINISH ITS PROGRAM.

WE'RE BREAKING ORBIT RIGHT NOW!

CLICK

COMMANDER-- THOSE ARE THE MAIN THRUSTERS--

YOU--YOU IDIOT!

YOU'VE DEPLETED OUR TANKS--WE'LL BARELY HAVE ENOUGH POWER FOR MID-COURSE CORRECTIONS!

HOW WILL WE GET BACK?

CALM DOWN, PEREZ...

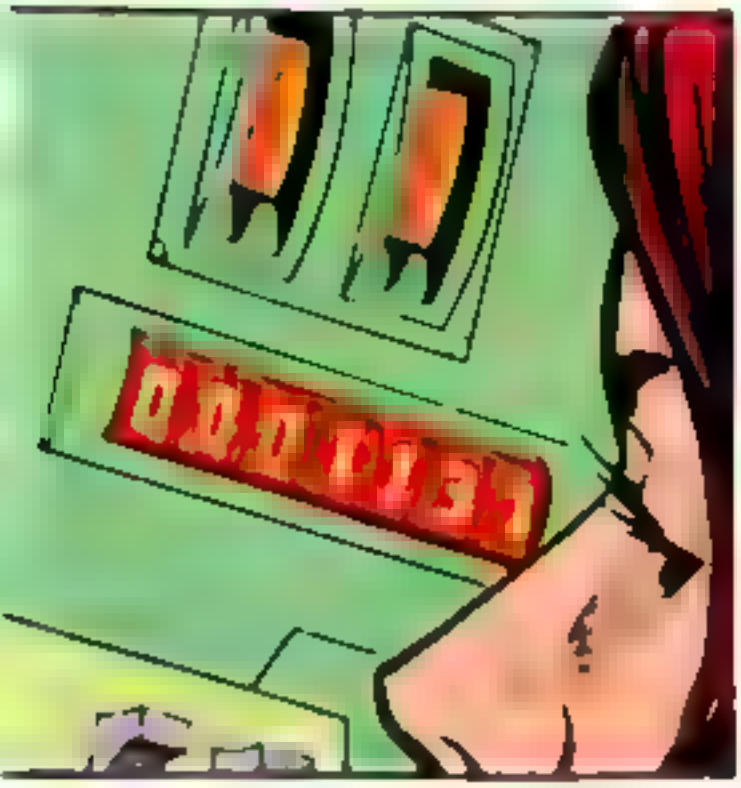
67:03:01

..AND LOOK AT THE CHRONOMETER!

SIXTY-SEVEN HOURS.

-- YOU'RE BURNING THEM AT FULL POWER!

HIT THE CUT-OFF-- OR WE WON'T HAVE ENOUGH FUEL TO RETURN!



THAT'S HOW MUCH TIME THE COLONISTS HAVE BEFORE THE AIR RUNS OUT

NOTHING ELSE MATTERS

WE NEED TO MAKE SPEED, PEREZ

IF WE'RE EVEN A FEW *SECONDS* LATE, WE'VE *LOST* THE RACE AGAINST TIME--AND THOSE PEOPLE UP THERE WILL BE *DEAD!*

REMEMBER, PEREZ, I'VE *"FLOWN"* THIS ROUTE BEFORE--THE *NAV COMPUTER* CAN PLOT OUR COURSE AS EASILY *IN* FLIGHT AS *BEFORE* FLIGHT--

--AND RIGHT NOW, *TIME* IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN A PRE-PLANNED *TRAJECTORY!*

WE'LL USE THE MOON'S *GRAVITY* TO SLOW US DOWN.

MAYBE WE'LL HAVE A *HARD LANDING*--AND MAYBE WE'LL *FAIL*--

--BUT WE'LL HAVE GIVEN IT OUR *BEST SHOT.*

AND, *PEREZ*--

MY NAME IS *MARTIN.*

BUT, CHAMPION, WITHOUT THE NECESSARY *FUEL*--

--HOW CAN WE *BRAKE* OUR VELOCITY TO *LAND*?

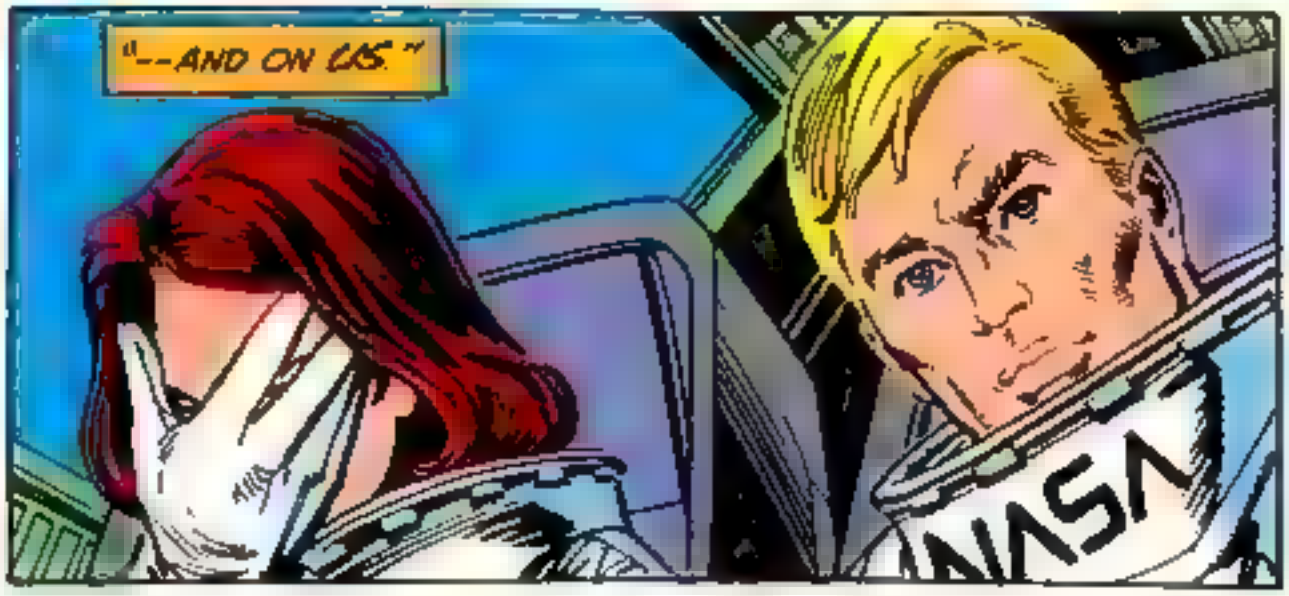
...

LYDIA.

APOLOGY ACCEPTED.

"MISSION CONTROL RELAYED REPORTS FROM THE COLONY. THINGS WERE GETTING BAD AS THE AIR TURNED FOUL. FIGHTS BROKE OUT ...A MAN WENT SCREAMING MAD FROM CLAUSTROPHOBIA., AND EVERY HOUR THAT PASSED INCREASED THE PRESSURE ON THEM--

"--AND ON US."



"THEN, ON THE MORNING OF THE THIRD DAY, WE LOOKED THROUGH THE VIEWPORT--

"--AND THERE IT WAS."

"LUNAR RESCUE TEAM, THIS IS MISSION CONTROL. WE'VE JUST LOST RADIO CONTACT WITH LUNAR BASE."

"COMPUTER PROJECTIONS INDICATE--A 95% PROBABILITY--THAT IT'S ALL OVER."

"YOUR MISSION IS SCRUBBED. STAY IN LUNAR ORBIT UNTIL A PROPER RELIEF SHIP CAN--"

NEGATIVE, MISSION CONTROL

WE DIDN'T COME THIS FAR TO QUIT WITHOUT TRYING FOR A TOUCHDOWN!

"CHAMPION! THIS IS DIRECTOR LASKY! DON'T BE A FOOL -- RISKING YOUR LIVES WHEN THERE'S SO LITTLE HOPE!"

"I'M ORDERING YOU TO -- SKWAARK!"

SO MUCH FOR MISSION CONTROL

WE CAN'T HEAR THEM AS WE SWING AROUND LUNAR DARKSIDE.

ANY RESERVATIONS, PEREZ?

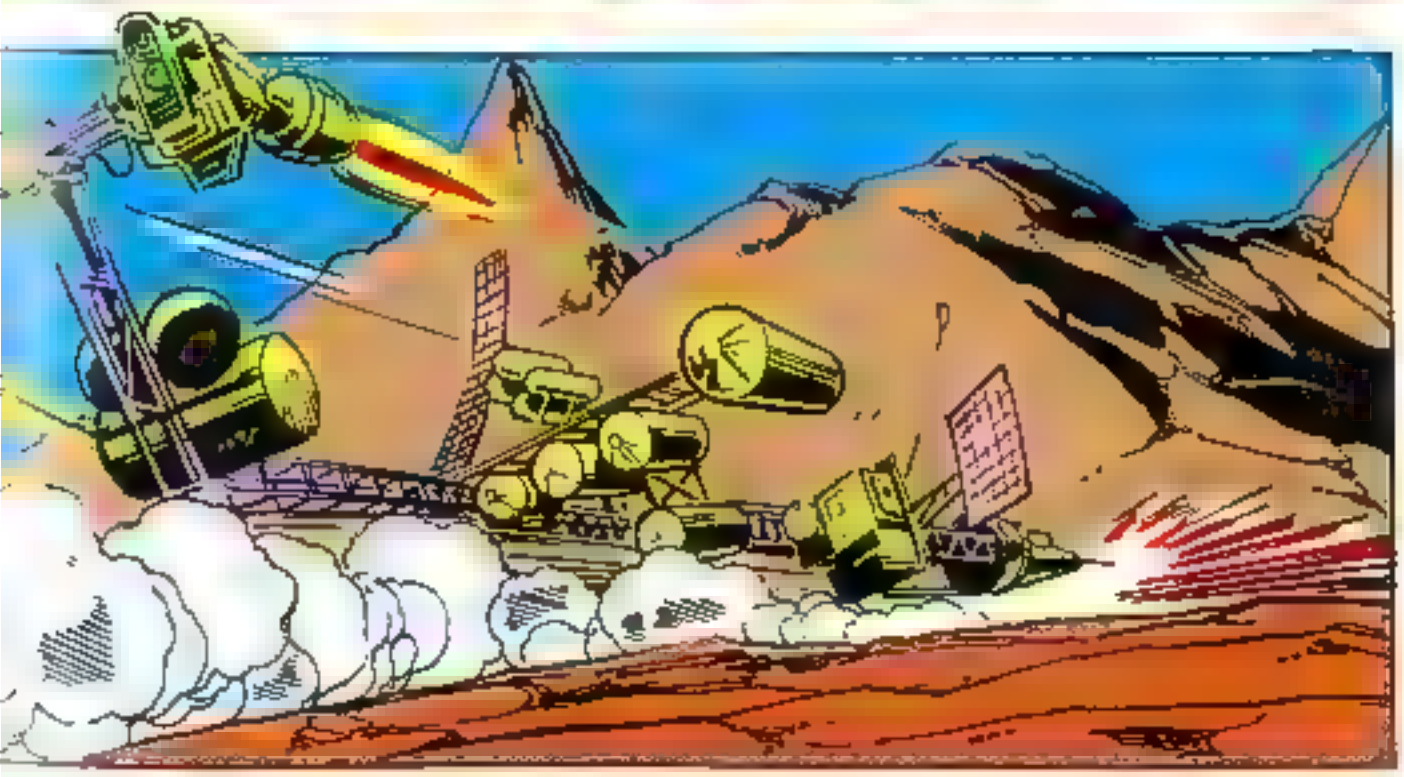
NONE. YOU'RE PILOTING THIS JUNKPILE, CHAMPION.

GO FOR IT!

"--IT WAS TIME TO BRING THAT BABY DOWN!"

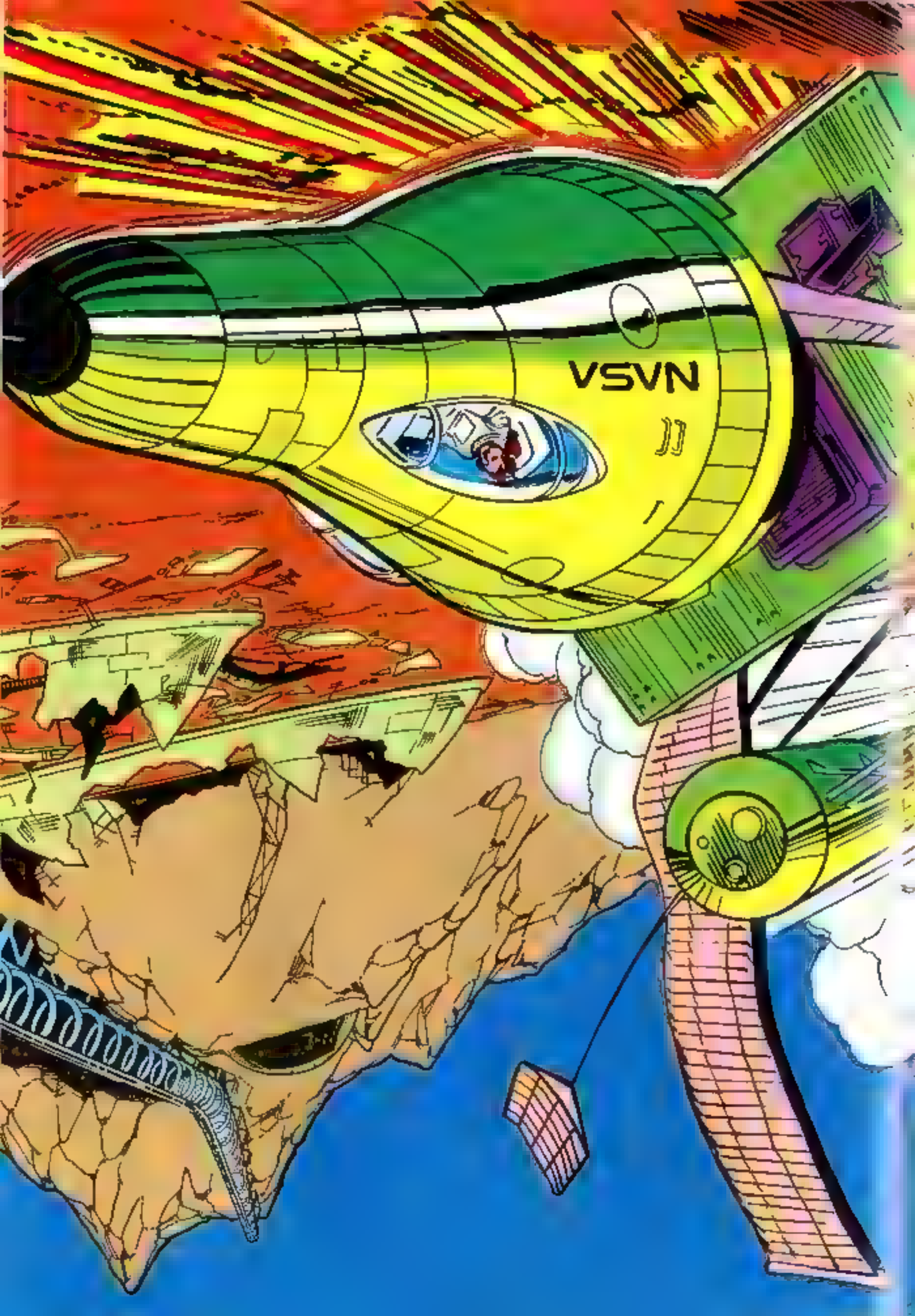
"ONCE TWICE HALF A DOZEN TIMES, WE CIRCLED THE MOON, AND WITH EACH ORBIT WE DROPPED LOWER, SLOWING OUR DESCENT WITH A COMBINATION OF GRAVITY AND DYING RETRO-ROCKETS..

"FINALLY, WE WERE TOO LOW TO MAKE ANOTHER ORBIT. AND, LIKE IT OR NOT--"



"I DON'T THINK MY HEART STOPPED--

"--BUT IT SURE AS HELL MISSED A BEAT!"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CHAMPION, YOU'RE CERTIFIABLE--BUT YOU'RE ALSO ONE HECK OF A PILOT

PEREZ, AS A HERO OF MINE ONCE SAID--

"THIS MAY BE THE START OF A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP."

ONCE I GET LOOSE OF THESE STRAPS, I'M GOING TO KISS YOU

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT AT THE TIME.

A FEW DAYS LATER-- WHILE WE WERE WAITING WITH THE LUNAR COLONISTS FOR A RESCUE SHIP TO ARRIVE-- THE WAR STARTED.

NASA MANAGED TO PROVE WHICH OF OUR ENEMIES TRIED TO WIPE OUT THAT MOON BASE--

--AND THAT LED TO A WORLD-WIDE SHOOT-OUT!

OFF ON

THE EARTH LYDIA AND I CAME HOME TO WASN'T THE SAME ONE WE'D LEFT.

WE LOST TRACK OF EACH OTHER AFTERWARD, DURING THE BREAK-UP... AND LIKE SOME OTHERS, WE BOTH ENDED UP WORKING FOR THE ATARI INSTITUTE, WHEN THINGS FINALLY SETTLED DOWN.

IT'S BEEN SEVEN YEARS SINCE I LAST SAW HER... WHY WAS SHE SO COLD?

CHAPTER THREE:
FINAL APPROACH

"ATARI CONTROL, WE'RE IN THE GLIDE PATH."

"ESTIMATED TOUCHDOWN AT 2202.00:00."

"ROGER, SHUTTLE EIGHT. YOU'RE RIGHT ON THE BUTTON."

"INFORM YOUR PASSENGERS THAT ASSISTANT DIRECTOR PERES WILL BE ON THE PAD WITH A TRANSPORT VEHICLE WHEN THEY DEBARK."

"ATARI CONTROL-- OUT!"

YOU KNOW, LUCAS, I'VE FLOWN IN THESE BIRDS FOR MORE THAN A DECADE NOW-- BUT EVERY TIME ONE LANDS, IT STILL FEELS LIKE A MIRACLE!

MARTIN, YOU'RE AN OLD PRO AT SPACE-TRAVEL.

STATION ONE WAS MY FIRST OFF-EARTH ASSIGNMENT..

...TO ME, IT'S JUST FANTASTIC THAT THESE MONSTERS EVER GET OFF THE GROUND!

WELL, FRIEND, I GUESS WE CAN BREATHE AGAIN...

SKR-EECHH

...WE'RE DOWN!

AND HERE'S OUR VERY OWN PRIVATE WELCOMING COMMITTEE OF ONE

DOCTOR LUCAS ORION, BRACE YOURSELF--

--THIS IS LYDIA PEREZ, THE GIRL OF MY DREAMS.

PROJECT: MULTIVERSE MUST REALLY BE HIGH PRIORITY, IF THE THREE OF US RATE A PRIVATE JEEP

SAVE THE SARCASM, COMMANDER

MULTIVERSE IS CRASH PRIORITY--

--PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT PROJECT EVER DEVELOPED BY THE ATARI INSTITUTE!

IT COULD MEAN THE SOLUTION TO ALL THE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS THE WORLD HAS FACED SINCE THE WAR!

BUT IF ALL YOU WANT TO DO IS MAKE JOKES--

WHOA, BACK, OFF.

I'D FORGOTTEN YOUR FABULOUS SENSE OF HUMOR.

BACK OFF YOURSELF, MARTIN.

MS. PEREZ WILL EXPLAIN EVERYTHING IN GOOD TIME, I'M SURE

IT'S NOT MY *PLACE* TO EXPLAIN, DOCTOR.

THAT'S UP TO *THE DIRECTOR*--HE'S BEEN IN COMMAND OF *PROJECT: MULTIVERSE* FROM THE BEGINNING. I WAS ONLY BROUGHT IN ON THE *DESIGN* END SIX MONTHS AGO.

BUT I *CAN* TELL YOU THIS... SINCE *THE WAR*, WE'VE SEARCHED FOR A *SOLUTION* TO THE WORLD *FOOD SHORTAGE*...

...AND WITH *PROJECT: MULTIVERSE*, WE MAY HAVE FOUND THE SOLUTION TO THAT, AND A WHOLE *HOST* OF OTHER POTENTIAL DISASTERS!

LUCAS CARVIN LISTENS WITH ONLY *HALF-ATTENTION*: THE MENTION OF *THE WAR*, AND THE SIGHT OF *THE RUNNERS* WHO JOG HOMEWARD ALONG THIS ABANDONED STRETCH OF *HIGHWAY*, HAVE STIRRED *MEMORIES* HE THOUGHT WERE *DEEPLY BURIED*.

... MEMORIES OF A DAY *SIX YEARS* IN THE PAST, DURING THE DARK MONTHS OF *THE BREAK-UP*, THAT PROLONGED PERIOD OF WORLD-WIDE *CHAOS* WHICH FOLLOWED ON THE HEELS OF *THE WAR*...

RUNNING FIGURES:

THE RUNNERS OF HIS MEMORY WERE *REFUGEES*, FLEEING A BLOODY *CIVIL WAR* IN THE HEART OF A ONCE-STABLE *AFRICAN STATE*.

LUCAS ORION WAS A *MEDIC* ATTACHED TO A *UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING FORCE*...THE *LAST* SUCH "*PEACE-KEEPING*" FORCE THAT DYING ORGANIZATION WAS EVER TO *SPONSOR*.

DEAR HEAVEN--THIS IS THE FOURTH BURNING VILLAGE WE'VE PASSED THIS MORNING!

WHEN IS THE FIGHTING GOING TO STOP?

UN

WHEN THE LAST MAN DROPS DEAD, DOC, AND THE WHOLE WORLD IS--

HE DIDN'T EVEN FEEL THE BLAST

AFTERWARD, HE REALIZED THEIR JEEP MUST HAVE BEEN STRUCK BY A *MORTAR* SHELL.

WHAM

THE *CONCUSSION* LIFTED HIM INTO THE AIR LIKE A *STUFFED TOY*.. BUT SOMEHOW, HE *SURVIVED* WITHOUT A SCRATCH.

WHAM

HIS *DRIVER* WASN'T AS LUCKY..

LUCAS MIGHT HAVE STAYED THERE, HUNCHED OVER IN *SHOCK*, WITHDRAWING FURTHER AND FURTHER FROM *REALITY*.. BUT THEN HE HEARD A SMALL VOICE, *CRYING*

WAAAA

AND HE REALIZED THAT THERE WERE *OTHERS* IN THE WORLD WHOSE *HORRORS* WERE GREATER THAN HIS OWN.

THAT *CHILD*--

WHAM!

WAAAAA

-- SHE'S IN THE PATH OF THE *BOMBARDMENT!*

HAVE TO GET HER *AWAY!*

SHELLS WHISTLED AROUND H.M--FLYING DIRT *BLINDED* HIM-- BUT THE GIRL'S *CRIES* DREW HIM ON ...

WAAAA

BEHIND HIM, LUCAS COULD HEAR *ENEMY TROOPS* CLOSING IN ON THE WASTED TOWN.

MACHINE GUNS CHATTERED HUNGRILY IN THE DUSK, NEARER, *NEARER* ..

LOOK OUT!

TAKA TAKA

TAKA!

SOLDIERS--CLOSING IN FROM NORTH AND WEST!

YOU'RE A CIVILIAN, LITTLE ONE, AND I'M A MEDIC--

--BUT IN WAR, THESE DAYS, THAT DOESN'T MEAN MUCH ANYMORE!

TAK-TA-TAK

TAKA

TAK!

GIVE A MAN A GUN AND A 'CAUSE" --AND HE'LL KILL ANYTHING THAT MOVES!

SOMEHOW, HE MADE IT INTO THE FOREST.

TAKA

TAKA

TAK!

THEY WERE SAFE IF "SAFETY" HAD MEANING IN A WORLD GONE MAD!

UN PEACEKEEPING FORCE HQ, FORTY MINUTES LATER...

UN

BLIMEY, SIR!

IT'S ONE OF OUR LADS-- A YANK MEDIC!

AND HE'S BROUGHT OUT A PRISONER!

NOT A PRISONER--

A PATIENT!

I SAY, OLD CHAP, NO NEED FOR HOSTILITY

WE'RE ALL FIGHTING ON THE SAME SIDE, AFTER ALL

REALLY, SIR?

I WONDER IF ANYONE WHO'S FIGHTING IS ON MY SIDE.

THIS KIND OF WAR DOESN'T HAVE "SIDES".. NO VICTORS...

...ONLY VICTIMS!

AND SO, THE NIGHTMARE *CONTINUED*, AS THE PEACEKEEPERS WAGED A BLOODY PEACE THAT SEEMED *WORSE* THAN WAR ITSELF

LUCAS SPENT HIS *DAYS* BATTLING THE RAVAGES OF A DISEASE AS OLD AS *CAIN AND ABEL*--

PLASMA

--AND HIS *NIGHTS* FIGHTING THE MORE *PERSONAL* RAVAGES OF *DESPAIR*.

I *CAN'T* GO ON IT'S *INSANITY*, BEING A PART OF THIS.

WHEN I VOLUNTEERED FOR THE *UN MEDICAL CORPS*, IT WAS A WAY TO *SERVE HUMANITY*.

.NSTEAD, *RIGHTLY* OR *WRONGLY*, I FEEL AS IF I'M AIDING HUMANITY'S *ENEMIES*.

I *HEAL* MEN SO THEY CAN *DIE*.

NO MORE. *NO MORE*

PERHAPS IT'S *FATE* THAT THIS CAME TODAY.

A *NEW BEGINNING* ...NEW HOPES, NEW *DREAMS*..

UNITED NATIONS
SPECIAL COMMUNIQUE

TO: DR. LUCAS ORION
c/o UN FORCE X320

FROM: ATARI INSTITUTE
SUNNYVALE, CA.

DEAR DR. ORION
BECAUSE OF EXPANDED RESPONSIBILITIES DUE TO THE BREAK-UP OF TRADITIONAL POLITICAL NATION-STATES, ATARI INSTITUTE IS ASSUMING CONTROL OF NASA AND THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE. STOP. YOUR OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC RECORD LEADS US TO OFFER YOU A POSITION AS MEDICAL RESEARCH

..PERHAPS EVEN A *NEW FUTURE* FOR ALL HUMANKIND.

ATARI INSTITUTE WANTS TO MAKE ME THEIR *DIRECTOR OF MEDICAL RESEARCH.*

I COULD *LEAVE* ALL THIS BEHIND.

AND THAT'S WHAT I *WANT*, ISN'T IT?

ISN'T IT.?

THE STARS HAD *NO ANSWER* FOR LUCAS ORION, THAT NIGHT...

AND NOW, SIX YEARS LATER, THEY ARE AS *CRYPTIC* AS EVER.

DID I DO THE RIGHT THING, RESIGNING FROM THE UN MEDICAL CORPS?

MY RESEARCH IN SPACE MEDICINE FOR ATARI HAS BEEN USEFUL--

--BUT HAS IT CONTRIBUTED TO SOLVING THE WORLD'S TERRIBLE PROBLEMS?

IF ONLY I COULD BE SURE...!

WHY DON'T YOU DROP THE MYSTERIOSO ROUTINE?

WHAT IS PROJECT: MULTIVERSE?

A HINT, CHAMPION

IT HAS TO DO WITH ALTERNATE REALITY!

WHAT? YOU MEAN-- PARALLEL WORLDS?

WORLDS LIKE OUR OWN-- IN OTHER DIMENSIONS--

THERE SHE IS, LUCAS!

ATARI INSTITUTE!

REDUCE SPEED
YOU ARE NOW ENTERING
ATARI COMPLEX

NOW THAT WE'RE SO CLOSE TO *HOME*, PEREZ.

--WORLDS WITH A *DIFFERENT HISTORY* THAN OUR OWN EARTH?

BUT THAT'S JUST A *FANTASTIC THEORY!*

IT'S *SCIENCE FICTION!*

WHIRRR

EXCUSE ME, DOCTOR

PEREZ TO BASE SECURITY I'M AT ACCESS GATE FOUR UNLOCK GATE AND CANCEL ALARMS

ROGER-- ALARMS CANCELED.

WE'RE INSIDE, BASE SECURITY REACTIVATE ALARMS

NOW, AS WE WERE SAYING, DOCTOR TO THE PEOPLE OF, SAY, THE EARLY 1980S, OUR WORLD WOULD BE SCIENCE FICTION

WHIRRR

LOOK AT IT THIS WAY..

"...SCIENCE FICTION IS SIMPLY A REALITY THAT HASN'T HAPPENED YET!"

WHIRRR

SO IT'S TO BE AS *EASY* AS THIS, IS IT?

I'D ALMOST EXPECT A *TRAP*--

--BUT IT'S *CLEAR* THE LADS IN SECURITY HAVEN'T A *NOTION* THAT ANYTHING'S WRONG!

AYE, THIS *SENSOR-DETECTOR* TELLS THE TALE--

--AND WHAT A *WOEFUL* TALE 'TIS!

A MERE SLIP OF A GIRL HAS PENETRATED THE *TIGHTEST SECURITY SYSTEM* IN ALL *NORTHCAL*, LAYING BARE ITS GREATEST *SECRET* FOR THE PLUNDERING--

--AND NOT A *MAN* OR *WOMAN* IN THE ENTIRE *ATARI COMPLEX* EVEN SUSPECTS I'M *HERE!*

TO BE CONTINUED

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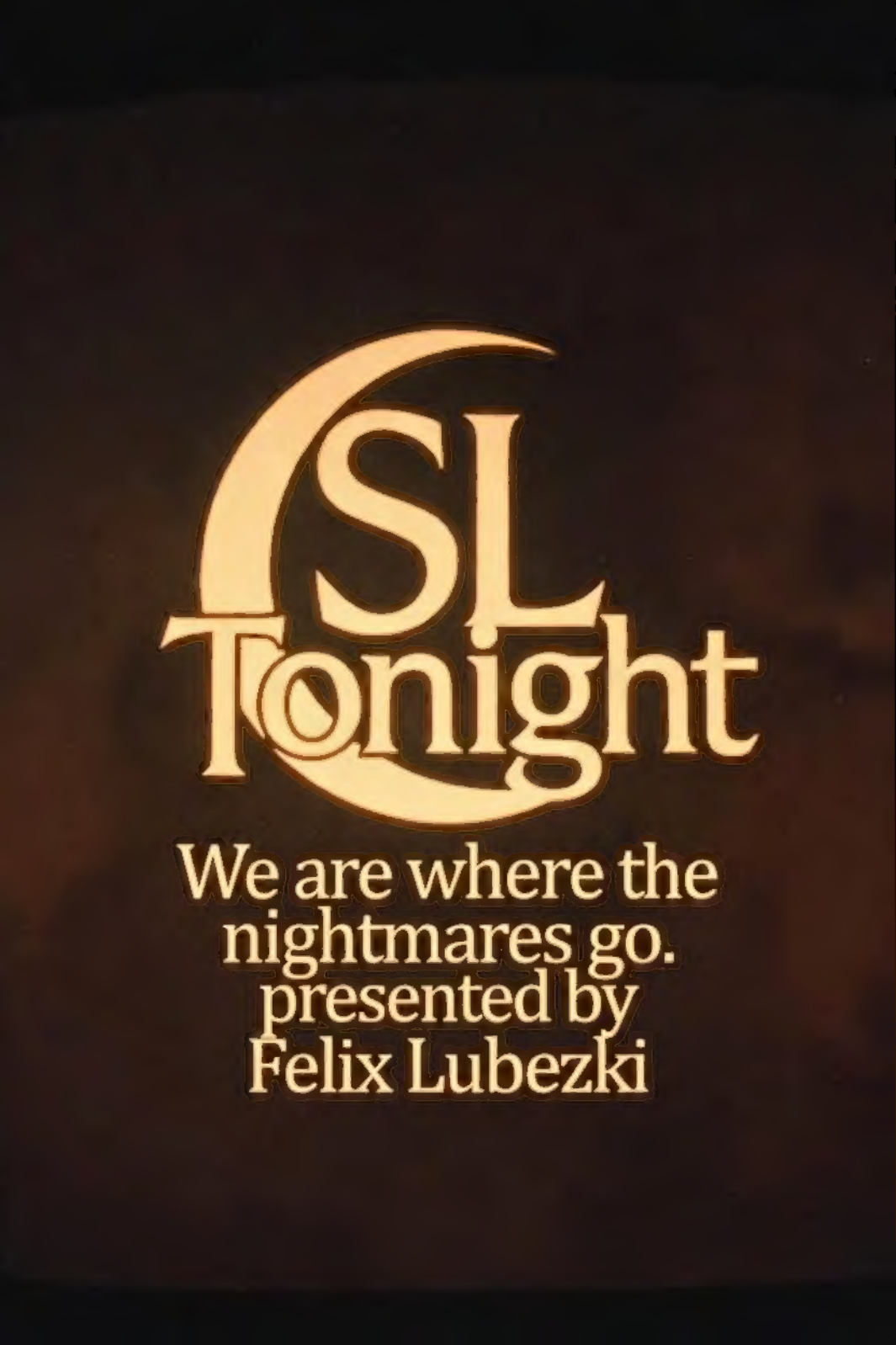
SL
Tonight
We are where the
nightmares go.
presented by
Felix Lubezki

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